

PRESS RELEASE

March 24, 1988

TESTS OF TIME: ART MUSEUM LECTURES FOCUS ON CONSERVATION ISSUES

Eight programs on the care of fragile works of art--from small, precious relics in museum cases to entire cities, such as Venice--and on the decisions that go into their care, will be presented at The Cleveland Museum of Art on eight successive Wednesday afternoons at 2:15, beginning April 20, 1988. Each of the eight slide-lectures will be offered by a member of the Museum staff. The entire series, titled "Conservation: Two Points of View--The Conservator and the Art Historian," is free and open to the public.

The inspiration for the series is the cleaning of the Sistine Chapel, where the patient work of Vatican conservators is dramatically revealing that Michelangelo's famous frescoes were originally much different than the somber paintings now so familiar and beloved. Bright yellows, blues and greens are being uncovered from beneath five centuries' accumulation of grime, candle soot, and darkened varnishes. Both the resulting new discoveries and the controversy among art historians and conservators that surrounds the 12-year-long cleaning process prompted Museum staff who visited the Sistine work-in-progress to offer for public discussion some of the issues central to the care, preservation, and restoration of works of art--in short, all that is embraced under the term "conservation."

Conservation is now the term for what used to be called "restoration," a term that properly refers to only one aspect of the field of conservation, that which replaces missing areas of a damaged work of art. Conservation is now understood to encompass preservation as well as restoration. Most works

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of art are inherently unstable, because the materials used in their making go through inevitable physical and chemical changes as they age. Each museum gallery and storage space is an environment designed to retard these changes and preserve the work in a condition as close as possible to its original state, with precisely controlled light, temperature, and humidity.

The profession of conservation demands, beyond an intimate knowledge of materials and a high order of manipulative skill, an aesthetic sensibility and a knowledge of art history. The curator and the conservator must work together--with a clear, shared conception of the scientific, historical, and ethical issues involved--on any decision about the care of a work of art. Modern museum practice attempts to approximate as nearly as possible, within the boundaries established by the condition of the work, the artist's original intentions. The questions that can be--and have been--hotly debated in this seemingly innocent human endeavor include questions of authenticity, ethics, and artistic judgment.

The first lecture will be presented by Frederick Hollendonner, chief conservator of The Cleveland Museum of Art. He will set the ground rules for all subsequent discussions by describing and defining principles of conservation at the Museum. Three equally important responsibilities fall to Cleveland's conservators: to examine each work of art (before purchase, before installation, periodically throughout its life at the Museum, before agreeing to lend it to an exhibition or to let it travel outside the Museum building); to preserve the work (environmental considerations for its display and storage, for instance); and to provide treatment if needed and, just as important, to recognize when treatment is, or could be, unwarranted. The Cleveland Museum's conservation studios are now well equipped with

3- conservation lecture series

sophisticated scientific instruments, which will figure in Mr. Hollendonner's presentation. Mr. Hollendonner has been on the Museum staff for 34 years.

Bruce Miller, conservator of paintings, will give the second lecture. Other speakers in the series will be members of the Museum's Education Department, and the Museum director, Evan H. Turner, who will present the final program.

The complete series is listed here:

Wednesday, April 20	Frederick Hollendonner, Chief Conservator Conservation at The Cleveland Museum of Art
Wednesday, April 27	Bruce Miller, Conservator of Paintings The Questions of Authenticity
Wednesday, May 4	Larry Forrest, Instructor, Education Department The Palace of Minos at Knossos
Wednesday, May 11	Barbara Kathman, Instructor, Education Department Cities of Vesuvius: Pompeii and Herculaneum
Wednesday, May 18	Nancy McAfee, Instructor, Education Department The Sistine Chapel
Wednesday, May 25	Helen Borowitz, Associate Curator of Education More than Meets the Eye: Pentimenti in CMA Paintings
Wednesday, June 1	Mariana Carpinisan, Assistant Curator of Education Venice Restored
Wednesday, June 8	Evan H. Turner, Director The Conservator: Art's Imperative Need

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